

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EA-11 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-13 EB-11 OMB-01

COME-00 DRC-01 /173 W

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R 181911Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3293

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

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AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL LOURENCO MARQUES

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

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AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 24597

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, XO

SUBJECT: FRANCE: SOUTH AND EAST OF SUEZ

1. SUMMARY:IN TERMS FRANCE'S INDIAN OCEAN ROLE, 1973 HAS
ALREADY SEEN A POMPIDOU VISIT TO DJIBOUTI, FRENCH ARMY'S
WITHDRAWAL FROM BASES IN MADAGASCAR, AGREEMENT TO PUT COMORO
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ISLANDS ON ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE, AND DECISION TO PHASE DOWN

NAVAL BASE AT DIEGO SUAREZ. WHILE PRESENCE IS DIMINISHING, FRENCH GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS IN AREA REMAIN, AND WE ANTICIPATE THAT FRANCE WILL ENDEAVOR TO MAINTAIN BOTH ITS MILITARY AND POLITICAL PRESENCE IN INDIAN OCEAN FOR MANY YEARS TO COME. END SUMMARY.

2. INDIAN OCEAN IN RECENT PAST HAS HAD RELATIVELY LOW PRIORITY IN FRENCH FOREIGN POLICY. HOWEVER, BRITISH REDUCTIONS EAST OF SUEZ, GROWING GREAT POWER NAVAL COMPETITION, AND POLITICAL EVOLUTION IN FRANCE'S OWN RELATIONS WITH ITS DEPENDENCIES AND FORMER COLONIES HAVE GIVEN NEW SALIENCY TO INDIAN OCEAN FOR FRENCH STRATEGIC ANALYSTS. INDICATIVE OF THIS RENEWED INTEREST WAS PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S VISIT TO DJIBOUTI IN JANUARY 1973. FOR LONGER TERM, MORE SIGNIFICANT MAY HAVE BEEN RENEGOTIATION OF FRANCO-MALAGASY ACCORDS LEADING TO A) WITHDRAWAL OF FRENCH ARMY UNITS FROM MADAGASCAR SEPTEMBER 1, B) TRANSFER OF INDIAN OCEAN COMMAND TO LA REUNION, AND C) PHASE DOWN OF NAVAL BASE AT DIEGO SUAREZ OVER NEXT TWO YEARS; AS WELL AS DECISION TO GRANT COMORO ARCHIPELAGO INDEPENDENCE BY 1978. AS RESULT OF THESE EVENTS AND DECISIONS, BY MID-1970'S FRENCH POSITION IN INDIAN OCEAN WILL HAVE CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY, EVEN IF THERE IS NOT ACCELERATED AFRICAN AND THIRD WORLD PRESSURE FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM DJIBOUTI, OR REUNIONAIS DEMANDS FOR AUTONOMY, IF NOT INDEPENDENCE.

3. FRENCH INTERESTS IN INDIAN OCEAN HAVE BOTH GEOPOLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS. ON ONE HAND, FRANCE DOES NOT WANT TO BE EXCLUDED FROM OR BE LEFT OUT OF ANY AREA, WHERE GREAT POWERS ARE COMPETING FOR INFLUENCE OR WHERE FRANCE ITSELF HAS HAD TRADITIONALLY IMPORTANT POSITION. HALF A MILLION FRENCH CITIZENS ON LA REUNION, 175,000 IN DJIBOUTI, AND 40,000 IN MADAGASCAR ARE IMPORTANT HUMAN STAKE. IN ADDITION, VIRTUALLY ALL OF FRENCH PETROLEUM IMPORTS COME ACROSS INDIAN OCEAN, WHICH IS EQUALLY A SEA LANE TO FRENCH TERRITORIES IN PACIFIC, IMPORTANT FOR THEIR NICKEL DEPOSITS AND NUCLEAR TEST SITES. IT IS THUS NOT SURPRISING THAT FRENCH FEEL THEY HAVE RELATIVELY HIGH INTEREST IN INDIAN OCEAN AND HAVE REPEATEDLY STRESSED THEIR INTENTION TO REMAIN.

4. UNFORTUNATELY FROM FRENCH POINT OF VIEW, ABILITY TO SUPPORT
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THEIR PRESENCE HAS ERODED IN LAST DECADE. FRENCH NAVY CAN ONLY AFFORD TO MAINTAIN RELATIVELY SMALL PRESENCE THERE; TROOPS HAVE HAD TO BE CUT BACK, AND MADAGASCAR HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY RESISTANT TO FRENCH POLITICAL INFLUENCE. AS NUMBER OF COLONIES WORLDWIDE HAS DECREASED, THE FEW REMAINING OVERSEAS FRENCH TERRITORIES AND DEPARTMENTS HAVE BECOME TARGET FOR CRITICISM. THUS AT OAU SUMMIT IN APRIL AND AT NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT IN SEPTEMBER, THERE WERE VOCIFEROUS DEMANDS FOR

FRENCH WITHDRAWAL FROM TFAI (DJIBOUTI), COMOROS AND LA REUNION. WHILE FRENCH CAN AND DO SHRUG SHOULDERS AT PRONOUNCEMENTS, BY RAISING EXPECTATIONS AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INVOLVED, THIRD WORLD PRESSURE PROBABLY INCREASES PROSPECT THAT THESE DEMANDS WILL BECOME SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES.

5. CURRENT FRENCH TACTIC IS TO PLAY FOR TIME: TO ACCEPT TWO YEAR PHASE DOWN AT DIEGO SUAREZ BUT TO HOPE FOR LONGER; TO KEEP COMOROS ON STRING FOR FIVE YEARS; TO STRESS AS POMPIDOU DID IN DJIBOUTI AND ADDIS THAT FRANCE HAS NO INTENTION OF ABANDONING TFAI. TACTIC LIKELY TO BE SUCCESSFUL FOR SEVERAL YEARS AT LEAST, AND FOR INDEFINITE FUTURE IN CASE OF LA REUNION FOR WHICH GAULLISTS SUCH AS FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER DEBRE HAVE STRONG ATTACHMENT. FRANCE WILL PRESUMABLY ALSO HANG ON INDEFINITELY TO ROCKY AND VIRTUALLY UNINHABITED KERGUELEN ISLANDS IN SOUTHERN INDIAN OCEAN WHERE GOF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH FACILITY.

6. IN THIS SITUATION OF WITHDRAWAL AND OF INCREASED THIRD WORLD CRITICISM OF FRENCH PRESENCE, GOF WILL BE LOOKING TO US FOR UNDERSTANDING OF ITS POSITION IN WHAT IT CONSIDERS TO BE INTERNAL MATTER. IT WOULD ALSO LIKE TO HAVE US RECOGNIZE FRENCH ROLE AS SUPPORTIVE OF WESTERN STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN INDIAN OCEAN IN FACE OF WHAT IT BELIEVES TO BE GROWING RUSSIAN AND CHINESE ACTIVITIES.

7. PROCESS OF DECOLONIZATION PROBABLY HAS ITS OWN DYNAMIC OVER WHICH WE HAVE LITTLE CONTROL, SINCE PEOPLES OF TERRITORIES CONCERNED ARE ABLE TO MAKE KNOWN AND TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN POLITICAL FUTURE WITHOUT ASSISTANCE FROM US. IN TERMS OF OUR INTERESTS IN FRANCE, WE SHOULD AVOID SUGGESTING THAT WE WISH TO ACCELERATE PROCESS OR HAVE ANY PREEMPTIVE INTENTIONS IN TERMS OF REPLACING FRENCH IF THEY LEAVE SCENE. AT SOME POINT, CONFIDENTIAL

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IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR USG OFFICIALS TO SHARE WITH FRENCH OUR OWN ASSESSMENT OF INDIAN OCEAN SECURITY ISSUES, NOT ONLY TO KEEP GOF INFORMED OF WHAT WE ARE DOING, BUT ALSO TO SEEK THEIR COOPERATION AND SUPPORT AS WE JUDGE NECESSARY. IN THIS CONTEXT, WE MIGHT WANT TO GO OVER OUR VIEWS ON "ZONE OF PEACE" IN INDIAN OCEAN, A SUBJECT ON WHICH WE CAN REASONABLY HOPE FOR DEGREE OF FRENCH SUPPORT FOR OUR VIEWS. IRWIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 SEP 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973PARIS24597
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS IRWIN
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730927/aaaaatuc.tel
Line Count: 161
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUL 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24-Jul-2001 by shawdg>; APPROVED <20-Nov-2001 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRANCE: SOUTH AND EAST OF SUEZ
TAGS: PFOR, FR, XO
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005